DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 062 EA 018 912

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TITLE Educator Stress: Myth or Reality?
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Burnout; *Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; Organizational Climate; Performance Factors; Policy Formation; Research Needs; *Stress Variables; Teacher Response; *Teaching Conditions; Teaching Load

ABSTRACT

Although many researchers conclude that education is a profession marked by high levels of stress or experience of "burnout," this paper contends that educators are more adaptable and hence less stressed than the literature would indicate. The paper surveys literature on educator stress, presents studies indicating low educator stress, and explores reasons why stress is overstated. Studies supporting high educator job stress focus on four categories: (1) lack of control with which to handle assigned responsibilities; (2) role conflict; (3) poor interpersonal workplace relations; and (4) time management difficulties. Results of three New York studies call these findings into question. In a literature review, 70 percent of articles on teacher stres are classified as anecdotal. Most studies are narrow in scope and inconclusive. A "job-related tension index" indicates that educators exhibit low stress characteristics, including role clarity, ability to plan workload, and ability to obtain needed information. Three factos relate to educatos' durability: (1) Stress is not new in education; (2) educators may be a hardy group; (3) as a senior work force, educators may have come to terms with their situations. Policymakers should reconsider resources being funneled into stress reduction efforts unless funds are targeted to specific goals such as improvement of classroom situations. Fifty-nine references are included. (CJH)

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EDUCATOR STRESS: MYTH OR REALITY?

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San Francisco, April 1986

EA 018 912

ABSTRACT

EDUCATOR STRESS: MYTH OR REALITY?

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The main body of literature that has developed about educator stress, both anecdotal reports and data-based studies, indicates education is a profession marked by high levels of stress. In fact, it is being concluded many educators are approaching "burnout".

The authors believe the case is over-stated and that education, as a field, is not nearly so marked by the littered casualties of distress that the literature suggests. The authors support this conclusion on both a small literature base which holds a contrary point of view and three studies of administrators and teachers, which consistently indicate that educators are much more adaptable and subsequently, less stressed, than previously believed.

The first study identifies the levels of stress principals are experiencing on the job, and investigates the impact of perceived locus of control and powerlessness on their stress levels. The second study investigates the extent to which school principals' perceived levels of stress are related to their role relationships with groups internal and external to the school organization. The third study examines teachers' levels of perceived stress, the organizationally based factors that are most stress inducing, and the predominant ways in which teachers manifest stress.

EDUCATOR STRESS: MYTH OR REALITY?

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The conclusions drawn in the educational literature, both anecdotal reports and data-based studies, leaves us with the belief that administrators and teachers are highly stressed. In fact, the image portrayed is that many educators are approaching "burnout," which can be loosely defined as the final stage of continuous and extensive stress. This message is coming through with such frequency and consistency that we tend to accept it as fact that most educators are highly stressed and unable to effectively carry out their duties.

The main body of literature on educator stress indicates that ours is a profession marked by high levels of distressful encounters* and that we are not faring well in this environment. We believe the case is overstated and that education as a field is not nearly so marked by the littered casualties of distress that are envisioned in

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* Distress is that form of stress which is debilitating and viewed negatively whereas eustress is that form of stress which is energizing and viewed positively.

the literature. We base this conclusion on a small but growing literature base which holds a contrary point of view and on three recent studies of administrators and teachers conducted in New York State, which consistently indicate that educators are more adaptable and less stressed than we have been led to believe. We think that it is important to examine this discrepancy because policy decisions and subsequent efficient and effective allocation of scarce human and fiscal resources should be based upon facts, not assumptions.

This article first summarizes the main body of literature that argues that educators are highly stressed, as well as the small but growing body of literature which indicates a contrary point of view. Second, it presents the outcomes of the three studies conducted in New York State which indicate relatively low educator stress. Finally, it explores possible reasons that educator stress is overstated in the literature and suggests why educators seem to be more adaptable and less stressed than is generally believed.

Survey of the Literature

To a considerable extent, research studies (Tung and Koch, 1980; Seligmann and Huck, 1978; Gmelch, 1977) tend to reinforce the assumption that professional educators experience high levels of harmful stress. These research studies tend to conclude that individually and environmentally, the stressors confronted and the effects of harmful stress felt by administrators and teachers are

quite similar. Differences between the two groups can be attributed to variances in the scope of job responsibilities, span of control, and the perspectives of supervisory versus instructional roles.

The studies done on this topic suggest an organizational setting in which job-related pressures have pushed many educators to the breaking point. Hendrickson's (1979) survey found that principals, on the average, work fifty weeks a year and put in fifty-six hours and three evening meetings per week. In that poll, over forty percent of the principals surveyed indicated that they no longer experience satisfaction and fulfillment in their jobs. Another survey, which included 1,600 principals, (Seligmann and Huck, 1978) found that over one-fourth intended to leave the education profession because of stress-related "burnout," and that among exceptionally talented principals, one in three were thinking of vacating their posts.

Teachers are also perceived as being plagued by a sense of general uneasiness, fatigue, boredom with daily job routines, depression and inability to cope. Studying a group of new teachers, as well as new professionals in other human service fields, Cherniss (1980) found that seventy-five percent of the respondents exhibited symptoms of stress and burnout after less than two years on the job. In Hawkes and Dedrick's (1983) study, over ninety percent of the teachers surveyed reported some level of stress in their work. Teachers identified financial concerns, student disruption, and lack of support and recognition as the main sources of stress in

teaching. In fact, fifty-four percent of the responding teachers expressed serious reservations about encouraging young people to select education as a career.

Studies such as those noted support the popular notion that job stress for public school educators is exacting an alarming and heavy cost. Such studies, as well as anecdotal reports, focus on four general categories that are associated with stress: 1) perceptions of lack of individual control (locus of control) and limited requisite authority (powerlessness) to handle assigned organizational responsibilities; 2) role conflict and role ambiguity; 3) poor interpersonal relations in the work place - with superiors, peers and/or subordinates, and between the school and its environment; and 4) time management difficulties.

Perception of Lack of Individual Control and Limited Requisite Authority

Control over one's destiny is a major factor influencing the level of stress felt by administrators and teachers. The more an individual feels powerless, the less he will be tolerant of uncertainty or be able to cope with role conflict and role ambiguity, and, as a consequence, the more he will be susceptible to job stress. Evidence (Cedoline, 1982; Cherniss, 1980; Karasek, 1979; Zaleznik, Kets de Vries and Howard, 1977) suggests that managers such as building principals and assistants principals will experience high

levels of job stress if they are in work situations where they perceive themselves to lack the power to fulfill their assigned tasks; their superiors place burdensome constraints on their decision-making; and their superiors are inflexibility regarding change.

Perceptual expectancy for control over life's events in general, or "locus of control" (Rotter, 1966), is also a significant factor in affecting stress levels. Studies (Steers, 1981 and Chan, 1977) indicate that possession of a high "internal" locus of control has a positive influence on the reduction of high levels of stress for individuals. There is evidence which indicates that educators possess a higher internality of control and, consequently, a lower level of stress than the popular literature suggests. For example, the results of Martin and Willower's (1981) investigations indicate that principals share control of their schools with superiors and teachers, but they feel at ease with this shared control because zones of influence are clearly delineated. Similarly, as indicated by Lortie (1975), teachers are aware of the fact that they are granted relative autonomy within the boundaries of their classroom and as regards their approaches to subject matter.

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

Unrealistic job expectations have been identified (Gmelch and Swent, 1981; Swent and Gmelch, 1977) as a major factor in promoting distress among administrators. That is, stress is fostered by

differences in the expectations of self in contrast to those of various public client groups with whom educational managers' must deal. Blood and Miller's (1979) research compared principals of the past with those of today. Surveying the principalship over time, they found that there has been a dramatic growth and diversity in role expectations and that this has increased role-based stress. Most principals and teachers anticipate less conflict with clients, fewer restraints on their actions, and a more even balance between work demands and time constraints than their jobs actually entail. Manera and Wrights' (1981) survey results show a correlation between a sense of "too high personal expectations" and high stress among principals, suggesting that principals' expectations for success in their work roles may not be fully realizable. Cedoline (1982) argues that the number and variety of roles administrators must play in order to satisfy their numerous constituencies, can have a debilitating effect

As regards teachers, Schwab and Iwanicki (1983) found that the organizational stress variables of role conflict and role ambiguity accounted for a statistically significant degree of variance in the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aspects of stress. Hawkes and Dedrick (1983) identified financial concerns, student disruption, and the lack of time available to complete necessary paperwork as salient teacher stressors. On the human side of school matters, teachers surveyed strongly indicated the need for

support and recognition in their jobs. Specifically, they desired administrative feedback, a more equitably-shared role in decision-making, praise for excellence in teaching, and support by parent and community groups. In short, the literature has maintained that teacher stress is significant and that it is directly related to a violation of expectations.

In contrast to these findings, there is an emerging literature which finds that the working climate for administrators and teachers holds few unexpected or unmanageable events. Martin and Willowers' (1981) structured observational study of five northeastern principals portrays "non-beleaguered" principals, able to handle varying amounts of pressure and routinely dispatch matters that have reached crisis levels. Gorton's (1982) analysis also strongly supports the conclusion that most principals are coping well and are not experiencing a high level of work-related stress.

There is comparable recent research which provides evidence to suggest that teacher stress, while wide-spread, is not as severe as we believe. Initial research by Feitler and Tokar (1981) indicated that, as a group, teachers were moderately stressed in their jobs. However, their comprehensive follow-up survey (Feitler, Tokar and Calder, 1985) of 3,789 teachers in 270 midwestern schools found that only 3.4 percent perceived themselves as "extremely" stressed while 13.9 percent characterized themselves as experiencing "low" stress. The remaining participants described their teaching jobs as only "mildly" or "moderately" stressful. These data demonstrate that

while some teachers continue to report high stress levels, the majority of the teaching profession may not be as highly stressed as previously reported.

Poor Interpersonal relations

Good relations among administrators, faculty, students, parents and the community, which are critically important to the achievement of educational outcomes, are often marked by conflict because of differences in perceptions and needs. Koff, Laffey, Olson and Cichon (1980) indicate that staff management, especially as regards dealing with personnel reductions, performance evaluations, and conflict resolution, was perceived to be the most stressful area of human relations for building principals. Another study (Swent and Gmelch, 1977), involving all Oregon school administrators, found that, in rating thirty-five stressful situations, the items "resolving parent/school conflicts," "evaluating staff members' performance," and "having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people I know," were ranked 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Manera and Wright (1981) also reported, in their study of fifty-two New Mexico principals, that the highest levels of respondents' job stress were in the areas of "making decisions about people you know" and "evaluating staff members' performance."

Hawkes and Dedrick (1983) found that when teachers were asked "If you could change anything about the school environment you work in, what would it be?", the teachers surveyed responded overwhelmingly

in favor of a dramatic improvement in relations with administrators. Research by Feitler, Tokar and Calder (1985) also indicates that interpersonal relationships between the teacher and administrator can be an important sources of job stress.

There are recent data (e.g., Gorton, 1982; Jones, 1983; and Martin and Willower, 1981) which present a much different and, we contend, a more realistic picture. These findings suggest that a majority of principals do not perceive or experience high levels of job stress working with staff, students and community members, even over long periods of time. Even Feitler, Tokar and Calder (1985) report that while more than forty percent of the highly stressed teachers they surveyed reported that supervisors were a source of stress, only fourteen percent of moderate stress teachers made the same statement. This may be because the notion of control is a major factor in the stress equation; i.e., moderately stressed teachers, like administrators, possess a greater sense of internal control and control over their work relationships than do their highly stressed counterparts.

Time Management Difficulties

The press of time to complete required tasks, the need to prioritize face-to-face contact time, the volume and pace of work load, as well as the variety, brevity and fragmentation of the educator's daily activities, contribute to making the work environment highly stressful. Koff, Laffey, Olson and Cichon (1980)

emphasize that the greatest problem related to time management for principals is dealing with the unexpected and having to resolve conflicts in a myriad of work day situations that demand immediate attention. Manera and Wright's (1981) study found that "completing reports on time" was ranked sixth out of fifteen potential stressors by principals. Cedoline (1982) estimates that the paperwork load for educational managers has increased 400 to 600 percent since 1970. He also calculates that these managers must make about 400 decisions daily, many of which affect the future of students and staff.

However, there is evidence to indicate that the image of the overworked, harried administrator is not so universal. Martin and Willower's (1981) structured observations found that while the observed principals' workload was clearly substantial, and somewhat in excess of the job-related time commitment of comparable middle managers in the private sector, their hectic pace represented a work situation which these principals accepted as routine rather than as exceptionally stressful.

In contrast to administrators, the literature does suggest that lack of time to accomplish tasks seems to be stressful to teachers. In one recent survey (Hawkes and Dedrick, 1983), it ranked as the number one stressor for teachers. Similarly, Feitler, Tokar and Calder (1985) identified "too much work" as the number two environmental stressor of the 127 high stress teachers, and as the number three stressor among the 3,135 moderately stressed teachers queried.

Three Recent Studies in New York State That Show Low Educator Stress

The results of the three studies presented below support the small but growing body of literature which indicates that educator stress has been overstated. Two of these studies focus on principals while the third focuses on teachers.

Study Number One: Principals in Western New York

This study of administrator stress (for full description of the study see Farkas 1983a and 1983b), conducted in 1982, investigated the impact of the variables of perceived locus of control and situational powerlessness on the stress levels encountered by public school principals. The population consisted of all elementary and secondary public school principals (n=302) in forty school districts of two Western New York counties. Returned and usable surveys, coming from every district, totaled 198, representing sixty-six percent of the population. Distributions of non-respondents were reflective of the population, suggesting that non-responses do not bias the results.

The survey questionnaire mailed to the principals contained three self-report instruments: I-P-C Scale; Index of Hierarchy of Authority; and Index of Job-Related Tension. The I-P-C Scale (Levenson, 1972) consists of twenty-four items arranged on a

six-point, Likert type scale with choices of responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The items are divided equally among the three dimensions of personality involving expectancy for control; internal control, powerful others and chance. The instrument asked respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each statement that was provided with respect to locus of control. Baseline data indicate the scale has a one-week, test-retest reliability of .64, and a split-half (Spearman-Brown) reliability of .62. Situational powerlessness, measured by the Index of Hierarchy of Authority (Aiken and Hage, 1966), consists of five questions, with five forced choice responses, ranging from "rarely" to "almost always" concerning situations of powerlessness. Baseline data with pretesting indicate scale reliability, with split-half correlation coefficients ranging from .80 to .90. Validity of the scale was established by the use of external criterion groups, and from observational and interview data gathered in various organizational settings. Overall job stress, measured by the Index of Job-Related Tension (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal, 1964), contains fourteen items which reflect respondents' experiences with tension-producing, stressful work conditions. Responses on the scale range from "rarely" to "almost always" regarding the degree of job stress experienced. Kahn and associates reported a split-half reliability of .72. Validity was established by baseline data collected in a national survey of 725

working adults and an intensive survey of fifty-three individuals employed in managerial capacities. Poppenhagen (1977) adapted the index and supported its reliability and validity factors in a survey of over 500 principals throughout Minnesota.

Results indicate that responding principals, as a group, experience a relatively low level of job stress. The mean stress score of 20.8, which is about two and one-quarter standard deviations below the scale's theoretical mean of 50.0, substantiates the finding of low job stress among principals. Moreover, additional descriptive data supplied in a survey item regarding the frequency of job stress reinforces the finding of low stress. When queried, only one-third of the principals reported that they "often" (31.8 percent) or "almost always" (1.5 percent) experienced stress in their jobs. Approximately one-half of the principals indicated that they experienced stress only "rarely" (7.1 percent) or occasionally (41.4 percent) in their work.

Gender was found to have a significant main effect on the level of job stress ($F=4.48$, $df=1,188$, $p < .05$) existing between male principals and the reporting of stress as a persistent feature of the principal's work-role. Care should be exercised in generalizing gender findings because the total number of female respondents was limited (n=26).

Responding principals perceive themselves as being in "control." The composite locus of control mean score of 44.0, which

is more than two and one-third standard deviations higher than the theoretical balance point between high externality (-100) and high internality (+100), is indicative of a strong sense of internality on the part of principals. Further, the correlation coefficient ($r=-.28$, $p < .01$) indicates that a significant inverse relationship exists between degree of internality (locus of control) and level of job stress. That is, principals who evidence low internality perceive greater job stress than those with higher internality. Regression data ($R=.11$, $R^2=.01$, $F=.62$, $p < .05$) reveal that demographic variables do not significantly influence the inverse relationship between degree of internality and level of job stress.

Finally, responding principals experience a low level of powerlessness in their jobs. In fact, the mean score of 21.2 is almost one and one-half standard deviations below the theoretical mean of 50.0 for the scale. This finding is even more dramatic when compared to Aiken and Hage's (1966) results. Their study of managerial personnel in 16 social service agencies reported mean scores ranging from one to two standard deviations higher. A high observed correlation ($r=.61$, $p < .01$) indicates that the principal's degree of powerlessness is directly related to his or her level of job stress. The data strongly suggest that situational powerlessness, in terms of decision-making power and role authority, has an important influence on work setting stress. Regression analyses ($R=.20$, $R=.04$, $F=-2.08$, $p < .05$) indicate that demographic

variables do not significantly affect the direct relationship between powerlessness and job stress.

The overall impression gained from this study is that the highly stressed, "man in the middle" syndrome is an overstatement for most principals. The respondent profile is that of managers securely in charge, with confidence in their ability to accomplish the tasks confronting them. Moreover, they appear assured that their organizations' top leaders afford them sufficient latitude and power to do their jobs without undue stress. For whatever reason, female principals seem to fare better than their male counterparts when confronted with stressors. It is possible that superiors and subordinates may respond differently to female administrators or it could be that females are biologically more capable of coping with job stress. In any case, while the relatively small number of female respondents does not support broad generalizations, it was the single demographic variable in this study to show significance and it merits emphasis and exploration.

Study Number Two: Principals Across New York State

The second study of administrator stress, also conducted in 1982 (for a full description of the study see Jones, 1983) surveyed a sample of practicing elementary and secondary principals from 125 school districts, urban, suburban and rural public school settings throughout New York State. To insure groups of sufficient size for

all the school characteristics of interest, a stratified random sample was drawn from the population. Of the 235 principals who responded (78 percent return rate), seventy-two worked in urban, eight-four in suburban, and seventy-nine in rural school districts.

A modified Administrative Stress Index (Swent, 1978; Indik, Seashore and Slesinger, 1964) was used to measure the perceptions of principals on the independent variables of superordinate, subordinate and external role relationships; personal characteristics -- principals' gender and total years of administrative experience as well as years in current position; and the institutional demographics of type of school (i.e., elementary or secondary) and location of school (i.e., urban, suburban or rural). The dependent variable of job stress was measured by using a combination of three items which established the level of stress experienced in the workplace. Potential stressors were scored on a five-point, Likert-type scale with choices ranging from "rarely or never bothers me" to "frequently bothers me." Tung and Koch's (1980) data, which showed high internal consistency and reliability of the response items, validated the instrument in their study of over 1,000 administrators. The expanded index, which was piloted twice to insure reliability and validity factors, compared favorably to Tung and Koch's results.

Results indicate that principals' levels of job stress are significantly related to their role relations with groups internal (i.e., superordinates and subordinates) and external (i.e.,

government agencies, special interest groups, and community members) to the school organization. Overall, principals experience greater stress when interacting with external groups ($\bar{X}$=2.28, t=-3.07, p=.002) than with internal groups ($\bar{X}$=2.18, t=-6.47, p=.0001).

When job stress is examined by sub-group categories, interaction with the subordinate group creates the highest level of job stress (X=2.31, r=.45, p=.001). The largest and most diverse groups in the school organization are comprised of teachers, aides and support staff. Principals' work days involve extensive role relationship activities with these subordinates. It is therefore logical that a strong relationship exists between stress resulting from interaction with subordinates and overall job stress for principals. These findings also buttress the results of Koff, Laffey and Cichon's (1981) study, which indicates that principals' greatest source of stress emanates from conflicts with their teaching staffs.

With two exceptions, results of the study indicate little support for the belief that personal and school organization characteristics significantly influence the level of job stress for principals. As with the first study reported, female principals consistently reported lower stress scores than their male counterparts. In addition, although the principals' levels of job stress were not significantly related to years of experience, there was a dramatic increase in stress levels in the second year of respondents'' first administrative assignment. This suggest that

there may be a period of "culture shock" after a "job honeymoon" year in one's first administrative position. As to other factors, the data show no significant differences either between school locations and principals' reported stress levels or between elementary and secondary school principals in regard to stress levels.

Overall, the second study showed principals reporting moderate levels of stress in their jobs. The possible range of scores on the composite stress scale was 3.00-27.00 with a theoretical midpoint of 15.00. The actual range of scores for total job stress was 12.00-16.20, with a mean score of 15.25, which is only a quarter of a point higher than the midpoint. The standard deviation was 5.00. These data do not support the notion that principals are experiencing high levels of stress in their jobs.

Study Number Three: Teacher Stress

A study of stress among urban elementary teachers, conducted over a period of a year from June of 1982 to June of 1983, resulted in findings that paralleled the two studies of administrators summarized above (for full descriptions of the study see Milstein, Golazewski and Duquette, 1984; and Milstein and Golaszewski, 1985). The study first identified specific teacher stressors and then focused on the implementation of intervention strategies that had the potential to positively modify the intensity of the stress felt from these sources.

The sites of the study were four elementary schools in a large New York urban school system. After obtaining agreement to conduct the study from the district's central administration and the teachers' association, principals of all K-8 schools were invited to nominate their schools as study sites. Of the nine schools that were nominated, four were selected on the criteria of similarity (e.g., student population, community demographics and tenure of faculty and administration) as well as willingness of the schools' faculty members to participate.

A pre and post test was administered at all four schools. The instrument included slightly modified attitudinal instruments designed by Ivancevich and Matteson, (1980); and Fimian, (1980). Categories of the instrument were factor-analytically derived following administration to large and diverse occupational groups. The items retained had a loading factor of .40 and above. Though the authors do not report a statistical measure of validity, the instrument achieved acceptable levels of construct and face validity. Reliability was determined by use of a coefficient alpha determination which resulted in category ranges from .58 to .95. For purposes of the research, slight school specific modifications such as salary, discipline, and student motivation were added after the instrument was reviewed by a group of teacher-stress consultants.

One school was designated as a control site and three were assigned alternative intervention strategies - i.e., individual

improvement; organizational improvement; and a combination of individual and organizational improvement - to ascertain whether differential effects would accrue.

Results of the study indicate that teachers are not highly stressed. When teachers were asked how stressful they feel their jobs to be, the mean response, on a five-point scale ranging from very little (1) to very much (5), was 3.35, only a third of a point higher than the mid-point of the scale. Post-test results indicated some impact of the intervention strategies, with the mean dropping to 3.15. It should also be noted that there was a high correlation (.05 level of significance) between this general question and 29 of the 35 questions which tested for specific organizational stressors. These correlation data clearly indicate that the respondents' general perceptions of stress level were accurate and that they had a good sense of how their generally perceived levels of stress related to organizationally based factors.

It is also relevant that teachers showed a high consistency in identifying highest sources of stress. Nine of the ten highest stressors reported in 1982 were also ranked among the ten highest stressors in 1983. Equally important, teachers perceive as stressful those things that hinder satisfactory performance of the functions of teaching (e.g., lack of materials and equipment; inadequate effort by students; excessive work loads; lack of sufficient time; discipline problems; and lack of parental support). That is, teachers have a

highly focused view of the elements of their job that are most stressful and these elements are directly related to classroom matters. However, even those classroom-based issues which constrain teachers from doing their work effectively are relatively low in intensity as stressors. On a scale that ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (always), the overall mean for the top ten items was 3.90 on the pre-test and 3.64 on the post-test.

The bottom ten sources of stress, which evidenced a mean score of 2.10 in the pre-test and 2.04 in the post-test on the same seven point scale noted above, showed a consistency in items selected; eight of ten items ranked lowest on the pre-test reappeared as lowest stressors in the post-test. Whereas the highest stressors focused on the classroom, the lowest stressors centered on organizational expectations and role clarity (e.g., opportunities to be creative; ambiguous job duty expectations; organizational roles; and difficulty of assigned tasks).

In other words, respondents experienced far greater stress from teaching-related issues than they did from issues related to the larger organization. This is important to note, given that many stress intervention strategies emphasize either organizational-level issues (e.g., improved relations between administrators and teachers; restructuring of decision-making processes and improvement of communications skills) or on individual manifestations of stress (e.g., diet workshops, physical fitness and counseling sessions to

improve personal problem situations) rather than on classroom-level issues (e.g., strategies to improve discipline, stimulate educational achievement and make better use of instructional time).

Reality Vs. Perception

The several studies summarized concerning administrators and teachers, portray a profession that is not highly stressed. Yet, as noted at the outset, except for relatively few prior studies (e.g., Gorton, 1982, and Martin and Willower, 1981) most of the literature concerning teacher and administrator stress points towards a profession characterized as replete with individuals experiencing extreme stress, or "burnout." Two points are relevant to explore. First, why the discrepant findings? Second, if the findings presented are generalizable, what accounts for the relatively low level of that educator stress?

Why The Discrepant Findings?

Over the past decade there have been two major strands to the literature that have focused on educator stress; anecdotal commentaries and research-based studies. Each, in its own way, has contributed to the misperception of high stress among educators.

The anecdotal literature on educator stress, particularly during the mid to late 1970s, was largely written and read by educational practitioners. A sampling of titles from a review by Cunningham (1982) gives some indication of the tenor of these anecdotal articles: "The Battered Teacher," (Block, 1977)..."Teaching May Be Hazardous to Your Health," (Mace, 1979)..."The Pain of Teacher Burnout," (Bardo, 1979)..."Principals: Your Job is Hazardous to Your Health," (Hendrickson, 1979)..."Tired and Frustrated Teachers," (Adams, 1975).

A review of the literature on teacher stress by Hiebert and Farber (1984) found that seventy percent of the articles reviewed were anecdotal; i.e., they "had no data base and were primarily statements of opinion about stress and teaching" (p. 15). This practitioner literature most often was written by teachers and administrators who had become disaffected and had a rather negative perception of the educational enterprise.

There was an extraordinary outburst of articles by this relatively small portion of the educational community who wrote scathingly of their negative experiences in the profession. So many of these "exposes" were written (in addition to those noted above, c.f. Carter, 1979; Dillon, 1978; Gray, 1979; Grossnickle, 1980; Moe, 1979; Sylwester, 1977; Weiskopf, 1980) that they began to be taken as fact and representative of educators' experiences. From our point of view, it is a classic example of a small, disaffected minority, speaking loudly and repeatedly until its point of view is assumed to be true.

Research-based studies that are frequently referred to regarding educator stress (c.f., Cichon and Koff, 1980; Feitler, 1982; Gmelch, Koch, Swent and Tung, 1982; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1979; Pratt, 1978; Schab and Iwanicki, 1982) also tend to leave us with the impression of high stress levels among these professionals. However, there are limitations to these studies. First, most of them are narrow in scope and are limited to self-reported data. Second, they do not include physical data which can be used to indicate the extent to which respondents' perceptions match actual manifestations of stress. Third, some of these studies required respondents to rank potential stressors (by the nature of ranking, some things have to be ranked high!), or to rate stressors against periods when it is assumed that stress is high (e.g., the first week of school), which may or may not be accurate.

Further, the results of data-based studies are far from consistent or conclusive. As Hiebert and Farber (1984) note:

> For example, Pratt (1978) found that stress correlated positively with teacher illness, but Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) reported no significant correlation between stress and teacher absenteeism...Some studies indicate that teachers report feeling stressed, while other studies contradict this finding. Recent data comparing stress levels of teachers with that of other occupational groups are not available, and older comparative data (e.g., Bentz et. al., 1971) suggest that stress is not necessarily more prevalent in teachers than in other occupational groups. At present the data are inconclusive. It is most reasonable to conclude that <u>little evidence</u> exists to support the claim that teaching is stressful or teachers unduly stressed. (p. 18). (Italics in the original)

In short, the combined effect of the writings of disaffected educators and the efforts of research-based stress studies combine to leave the impression of a profession that is nearing the point of mental and physical exhaustion. For reasons noted, we think this is an inaccurate conclusion. The profession appears to be in much better shape than the literature would have us believe.

What Account for the Relatively Low Level of Educator Stress?

In actual fact, as our data indicate, education can be thought of as a low-stress occupation. Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964), examined organizational settings and established a "job-related tension index" which resulted in the development of a typology contrasting the characteristics of high and low occupational stress groups. Their typology can be summarized as follows:

Characteristics of Low and High Levels of Occupational Stress

Characteristics of Low Level of Occupational Stress	Characteristics of High Level of Occupational Stress
Role clarity	Role ambiguity
Authority commensurate with responsibilities	Role responsibility-authority imbalance or conflict
Ability to plan and moderate work load	Extremes of workload
Individuals interact in organization's information network	Individuals are unable to obtain information necessary to fulfill role responsibilities
Ability to plan career goals with confidence	Job insecurity and lack of ability to predict career future

When administrators and teachers are viewed against the template of the above typology, the profession more closely approximates a low level occupational stress group than it does a high level occupational stress group. Role clarity, authority, and the ability to plan, do not seem to be as much in question among educators as might be believed. Further, while teachers and administrators may not always see themselves as being at the center of the information network, they do perceive that they can obtain the information that is required to do their jobs. Finally, educators, many of whom have been teaching and/or administering for more than a decade, do not seem to feel

blocked in their careers. They may not see much room for advancement, but most appear to have made peace with themselves about the status of their professional lives.

While it is impossible to ascertain with certainty why educators exhibit such durability when confronted with potentially stressful situations, there are at least three factors that appear to be of relevance. First, although it has recently been intensely examined, stress is far from a new phenomenon in education. In fact, the profession has long been marked by conditions that promote stress. A recent historical review of educator stress by Smith and Milstein (1984) indicates that stress-related issues of a major magnitude have been present since at least the 1930s. Many of these issues are time bounded: during that decade the concern was with salaries, tenure and retirement; during the 1940s the emphasis shifted towards progressive education issues; in the 1950s extra-curricular activities and diversification of educator roles were the major concerns; the 1960s were marked by debates about the rights of students, parents, and teachers as well as concern over whether the system was working as intended; the emphasis in the 1970s shifted to the needs of emotionally and physically battered teachers; and during the 1980s the concern has centered around declining enrollments, reduced resources, discipline and accountability.

There have also been many issues that concerned educators in the 1930s and still are bothersome in the 1980s. These issues include compensation based upon time on the job rather than on achievement;

lack of collegial feedback; role conflicts (in particular, the need to be both custodian and academic mentor); lack of control by teachers over decisions that directly affect their work; lack of career ladders; preservice education that is often judged to be insufficient to meet the needs of teachers; and failure on the part of school districts to protect teachers and administrators in basic survival areas.

The point of this brief historical perspective is that one possible explanation concerning the relatively low level of stress may be that educators have long been tested by stressful conditions. As a result of this continuous and extensive experience the profession may have learned to adapt and cope better than would be the case if there were no such precedents.

Second, educators may simply be hardier as a group than we tend to believe. The conditions under which they must operate today are replete with stressors, and it is becoming increasingly clear that educators are quite resilient. Principals, as noted, are not as stressed as comparable groups of administrators in other types of organizations. For example, Martin and Willower's (1981) observations found that while the principals' workload was substantial, and somewhat in excess of the job-related time commitment of comparable private sector middle managers, the hectic pace represented a situation which the principals accepted as routine and not as exceptionally stressful. We believe that self-selection is a major factor here; i.e., as a group, those who choose to become

principals and persist in the job perceive the situations they encounter as challenges rather than stressors.

Teachers, for their part, are mostly seasoned veterans today. The lack of opportunities to move into different occupations during the recessionary era we recently came through has kept many teachers in education. The result is a predominantly senior teaching cadre. In fact, according to a recent survey conducted by Lou Harris (1984), the median on-the-job experience of American teachers is 14.7 years. Teachers who have survived for so long are likely to discover, and share with each other, many techniques for coping with stress. They may also become a little numb. That is, repetitive exposures to difficult conditions can have a novocaine effect, making teachers less responsive to the stress they encounter.

Third, as a relatively-senior work force, teachers and administrators may have come to terms with their professional situations and, in the process, learned how to deflect potential stress by looking elsewhere for satisfactions that a younger work force might expect to achieve from within their organizations. In fact, as Kreis and Milstein report (1985), based on a study conducted in the same school district as the study of teachers reported here, senior educators seem to be satisfied with their organizational situations, mainly because they have come to expect relatively little beyond the basics of job security and economic compensation from their school districts. Instead, they turn for needs fulfillment to such sources as families, friends, support groups, and hobbies.

Detachment from one's work situation may have costs, but one clear benefit is that it does help to blunt the intensity of job-related stress.

In Closing

If the major point of the argument is correct -- i.e., educators are not nearly as stressed as we have come to believe, then educational policy makers should reconsider the deployment of resources being funneled into stress reduction efforts. At present, many school districts are exploring means of mitigating the effects of stress on teachers and administrators. We caution school boards and educational leaders to examine their situations and ascertain with greater certainty whether such efforts are warranted. Further, when allocation of scarce resources for such efforts does seem appropriate, we believe that they should be carefully targeted to meet those stressor situations that are most bothersome -- i.e., improvement of classroom-based situations.

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